THE LAST CIGARETTE

by JOHN EBERLY

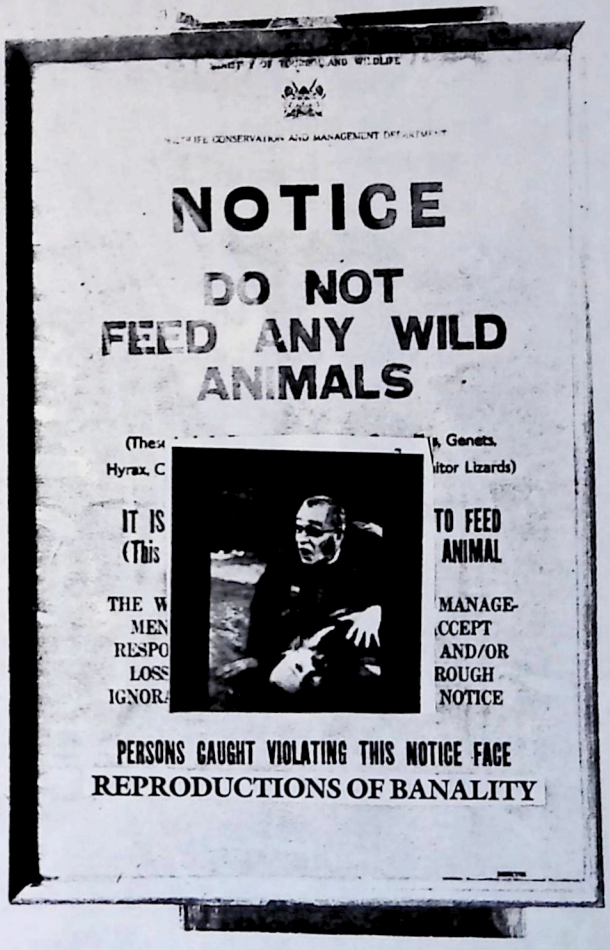
Controversy & Correspondence

These are the dead words of a dead man. Accompanied by images of the dead. Some familiar, some obscure, neither corresponding to the other; no mirror imagery reconciling a Mind-Body duality. Christ said "behold, I am making everything new again". Here it is written "Look, everything is Dying". It is the same.

THE LAST CIGARETTE by John Eberly. Copyright © July 1987 by MUMBLES PUBLICATIONS P.O. Box 8312, Wichita, Kansas 67208 U.S.A.

"I've long had the suspicion that the reason some people choose to become artists or writers or scientists, and the reason they make art they make or think the thoughts they think or write the books they write, is their attitude toward death. That at a certain level of culture, the presence of death, real or imagined, shapes the work of creative people. It's death, not sex, that drives them on."

from THE FORBIDDEN ZONE
by Michael Lesy



MINISTRY OF TOURISM AND WILDLIFE

WILDLIFE CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT DEPARTMENT

NOTICE

DO NOT FEED ANY WILD ANIMALS

(These ... s, Genets,
Hyrax, C ... itor Lizards)

IT IS ... TO FEED
(This ... ANIMAL

THE W ... MANAGE-
MEN ... CCEPT
RESPO ... AND/OR
LOSS ... ROUGH
IGNORA ... NOTICE

PERSONS CAUGHT VIOLATING THIS NOTICE FACE REPRODUCTIONS OF BANALITY

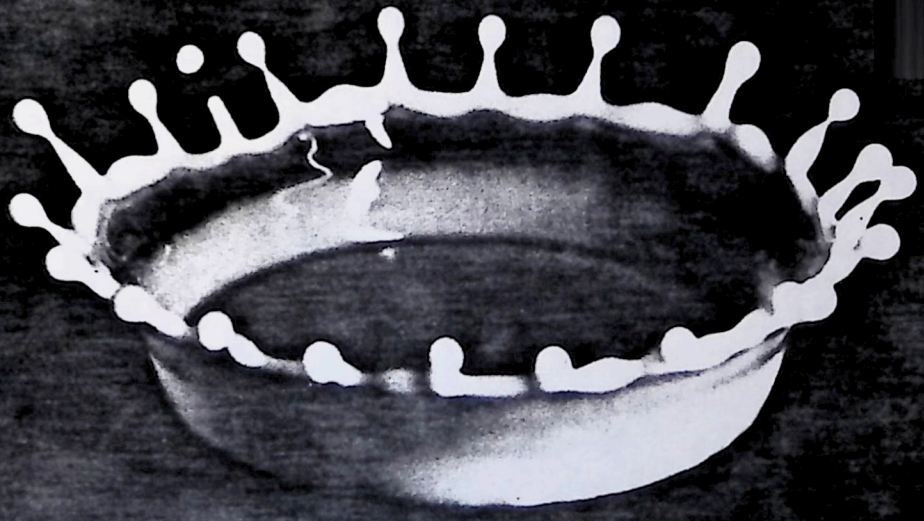
I am very hungry. It is still early yet but my stomach is very loud and empty. I will wait, torturing myself for a few hours, until lunch. I know that all there is for breakfast is milk, and all there is for lunch is cheese, so given the choice between the two I'll hold out for cheese. I can never eat the products from the same animal twice in one day, or even at the same time, at the same meal. To eat both the milk and the cheese today would disgust me thoroughly. I've never known if this code I've imposed is of a moral nature or simply a perversion of personal logic, but as you'll see farther on in this story, the obsessions that rule my existence rely far more on faulty logic and reason than on any phony morality.

Think about it. I have. It doesn't matter that it doesn't make sense to you, it is my reality, my life I live and suffer through, so don't worry if you don't understand; I'm not saying I do either.

Eggs for breakfast, fried chicken for lunch No thanks. Or how about chicken salad with chunks of meat and hard-boiled egg? My friend Joe once worked at a sausage factory up in Nebraska "You know when they say 'Whole Hog' in their TV ad? Well, they mean exactly that, they grind the whole thing up." Beef steak, hamburger, roast, cheese, milk, butter.... Ham, sausage, bacon, cutlets..you get the idea. How about vegetables? Well it once occurred to me that a fertile garden is mainly composed of shit-animal manure or human (the latter most disturbing to me) so the cycling and recycling just goes on and on and suddenly after writing all this down I'm not so hungry anymore.

FRIGIDAIRE

So our character is hungry, or not hungry after all, and frozen, not able to act one way or the other.
The last bit he was into there just before he quit, about vegetable gardens and shit, bothers him more that the talk of corresponding meals and animal products. In fact, it is precisely this inevitable eat/shit cycle that provides the basis for his inertia, a word he loves, by the way, perhaps worships.
His memory of shit of course begins in early childhood when he assumed, like some other infants surely? That his mother found a great and simple joy in changing his dirty diaper; her humming, the warm washrag on his genitals and anus, her bare hands touching him everywhere, the bright red lips smiling down, the pungunt, lingering, rich smell.
On a dare-he would always, throughout his life accept challenges, especially those acts that seemed particularly outrageous to others-when he was about eight years old, he ate some of his own shit, and finding it not altogether disagreeable, convinced the other boy, who posed the dare, to try it too, upon reciept and taste of which the boy ran home crying and spitting.
Now, just the other day, while alone in his wife's home he spotted a smear of shit high up on the rim of the toilet bowl. He tried pissing it off, but it remained stuck until the movement of his tongue broke it loose.



Around noon I ate some cheese. Orange cheese. Some of it crumbles and falls through my fingers to the floor. The cat would eat it if I had a cat. I leave it for her there anyway. The phone is ringing, but I never answer it; its never for me. I look out the window. A little girl walking by spots my outline through the drapes and runs away. I am outside playing. Theres noone home. I hear my mother calling my name, I look at the house but she's not there. I run away. Where to? Look back at the house. A figure stirs at the window and then moves out of sight. Is it her? I stop and move toward the house. I go in. Theres noone inside. The little girl runs down the sidewalk as fast as she can. I watch for a few seconds, then move away from the window as she looks back. I touch all the woodwork in the house as I move through it. It frightens me to think what would happen if I did not do this. At the doorway to the kitchen I hold my cheesy breath and run my hands from the top down to the baseboard in a sweeping arc. I feel cleansed as I enter. All the wood in the house shines, blinking back at me. I kick some cheese crumbs under the refrigerator. It hums gratefully. I turn around. At the kitchen table sits my mother, holding and petting a purring cat. The image fades before my eyes like an old yellow photograph. It just didn't make good sense: my mother always hated cats. I look back at the floor in front of me. The remaining bits of cheese are gone.

madness
the roof
the bare
with insa

Our man lives by inertia. Surrounded by fears and memories he rarely understands. But he must go out, leave the house, to get some cigarettes. In this case, unlike many others, his obssession with tobbaco overrules his compulsion to stay indoors, to stay at home. You can spot him on the street, walking along, hands in pockets, eyes to the ground, pained expression. He hates exposure: it only enhances his vulnerability. He does not fit into the environment, his prescense is totally alien to the out-of-doors. He has more in common with the concrete sidewalk he moves over than the people he passes as he walks. When he enters the convienience store several people look at him, then quickly look away, as if noone had entered. When he asks for Lucky Strike non-filters the clerk frowns, eyes scanning the stock, then turns and moves into the back room. He is left standing by himself at the counter, watching a plastic display of Mexican jumping beans vibrate by the cash register. He wants to leave, bolt out the glass and steel doors but his position is fixed. At this moment he cannot tell if he'll ever move from this spot. Other customers line up grumbling behind him. The clerk emerges and places the red, black and white square in front of him on the counter. Finally he pays and leaves. Every fiber of nerve in his body lights up as he walks home. He imagines his body gives off a hard edged white light when in fact he is only dimly lit. His key shakes in the lock. He makes a wide arc with his hands over the door frame as he enters, and feels calm returning to his muscles. He strikes up a Lucky, and blows smoke out over the livingroom.

God, the same nightmare. I straighten up in my chair as the preacher bellows out of the television, "Brothers and Sisters, if you're not on God's side, who's side are you on?" "Amen!" cry the faithful. I get up and turn the set off. Look out a window. A little girl runs away. I move out of sight. I look at my desk. There is my typewriter, a stack of white paper and two bottles of correction fluid. Maybe I can write something. I sit down and turn on the electric Smith-Corona Coronet Super 12. It hums mechanically. I say "Hello" in English, a language it doesn't understand either. It purrs softly, oblivious to meanings. I start to type: 'Yesterday I met William S. Burroughs.' This is true; I met him on Saturday, April 11, 1987. He signed all the first editions I own of his works. I gave him two books from my collection that he had selected, "Typhoon" and "Sea Stories", both by Joseph Conrad, as a gift. His last words to me as he left were "I have miles to go before I sleep." He smiled, shyly, and touched the brim of his hat in a parting gesture. His secretary, James, gave me their address in Lawrence, Kansas. I spent the rest of the afternoon walking the windy streets of downtown Wichita, with no particular destination in mind. A woman passed me. She did not look up, and I didn't catch her eyes. Cars drove by, noone looking my way. A bum shuffled toward me. I reached into my pocket for change as he walked past without a word. I caught my reflection in a window as the sun hit it, I vanished. I began to think I was dreaming again. Burroughs has appeared to me in dreams before, enigmatic like the ghost of literature past, present and future "miles to go before I sleep". Dust hits me in a wave of wind at the corner of Main and 1st streets. I close my eyes automatically. I stare at the page in the typer. One sentence: 'Yesterday I met William S. Burroughs.' The machine hums electronically. I roll the "On" switch to "Off".

DOSTOEVSKY

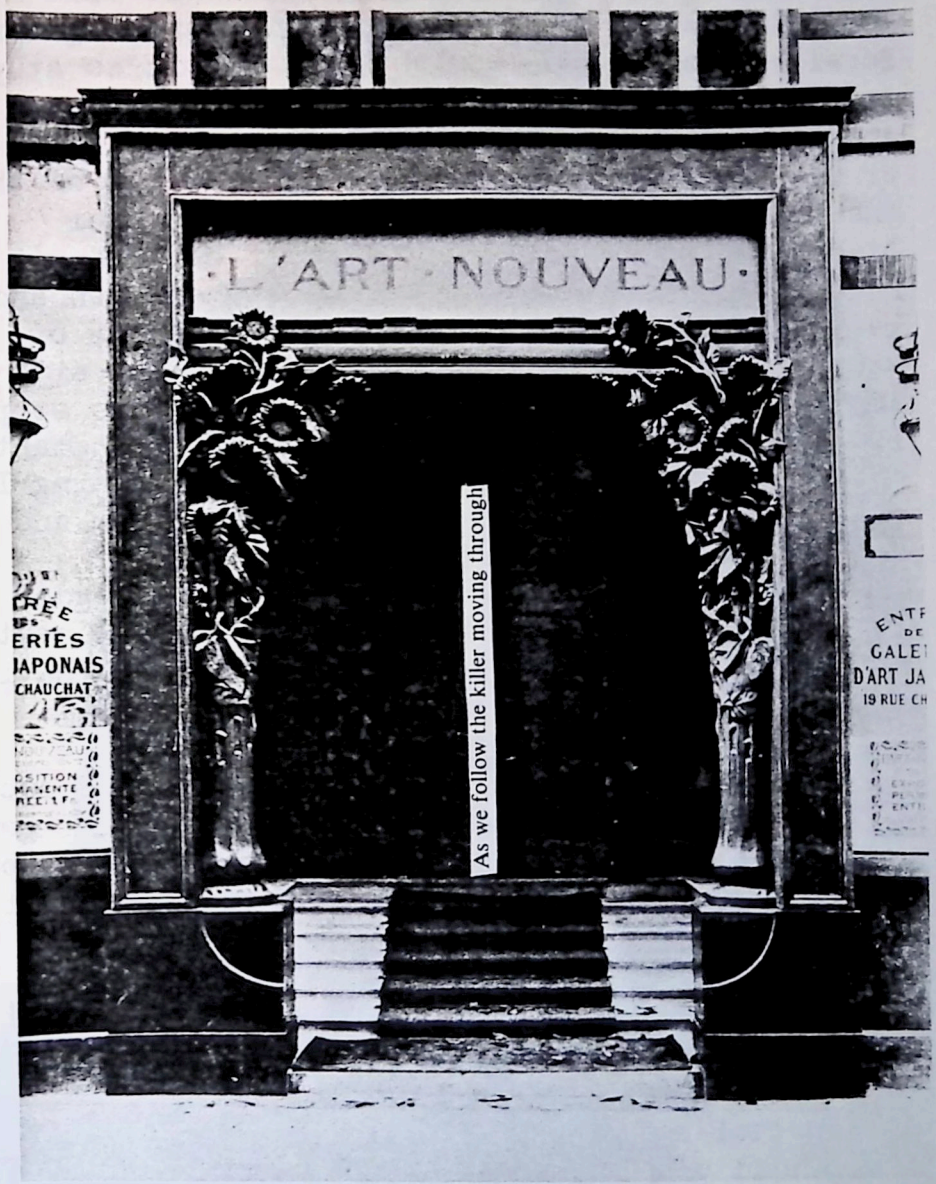
Electric blue-eyed fish leap out of the lighted fountain and walk around cocky on their tail fins coming on like Paul Newman in the Hustler: "Come on Fatman, let's shoot some Pool". They jump back in and I follow, my body turning limp and boneless like Don Knotts in the Incredible Mr. Limpid see my body turned fish-like but my head remained my human head. I was going down. That foot on my head slipped and the drain opened up long enough for me to slither in, and I swam down into the narrow pipe toward a distant blue light; first a pin point now growing larger and larger, paler blue and I plopped out onto the floor of a pool hall right at Jackie Gleason's feet. He looked down at me smiling, still chalking his cue "Well, well, he showed up!" "That's right, Fats, and I brought the money." Carl Maldin sighed and relaxed in his seat by the table chewing the end of a short stub of a cigar as I layed the dripping bills on the bar. "It must be poring down out there, Kid, you're soaking wet!" Spit the Fatman as I showed him the toothy grin Newman is famous for. I took a cue from the rack as the other fish in the joint eyed me with flat glassy lidless expressions. The walls were a faded sickening yellow in the bad light from the single bare bulb over the pool table, the oily wooden floor creaked under the weight of Jackie Gleason as he shifted from foot to foot. My pregnant girfriend leaned drunkenly over the bar toward me "Let's go home now, JohnnnEeee!" Her shoulder length blond hair draped over her face as she fell, closing that show forever. I suddenly felt like Steve McQueen, embarrassed, unsure of myself, but the image passed as I danced around the table on my tailfins playing nineball with the Fats. When I resurfaced, the money was gone, the fountain lights were shut off, the beautiful blue-eyed fish were floating belly-up, bloated, their scales reflecting a dead rainbow. Far off someone played a muted blues on a horn and I thought to myself: Baby, the rain must fall.

the influence of Dostoevsky on

ELVIS IMPERSONATOR ARTIE MENTZ

Reviews of my books amuse me. In one day I recieved two magazines that both included reviews of the same book. One person wrote: "Beautiful as a dark pond. Reccomended." The other reviewer says: "Valid observations no doubt, but where is the cultural context that would help us to see alienation as a social, not idiosyncratic, condition?"
On the one hand, what is beautiful about a dark pond? I rather like the imagery, since dark ponds have always terrified me as some bottomless pit of indefinable fear, something lurking below a moving canopy of blackness, like that thin membrane over the back of the mind that suddenly erupts with forbidden visions.
And it is the nature of these visions, these very extremely personal visions that makes them antisocial, as the next reviewer suggests, and by definition idiosyncratic. The only aspect that can be recognized as universal in any reasonable way is the use of archetypes and symbolism which must act as a sort of map, however unreliable, which depends on the experience of the reader for interpretation. The risk involved in trying to express the "unspeakable visions of the individual" is apparent, then, when one considers that the traditional role of accepted fiction relys on the communication factor, and this sort of personal revelation often denies that communication. The fact is, alienation is by definition antisocial; and the alienated is such only because of a code they choose to follow that deviates from others, a structure concieved for whatever reason to keep them apart. Alienationists have only their alienation in common.

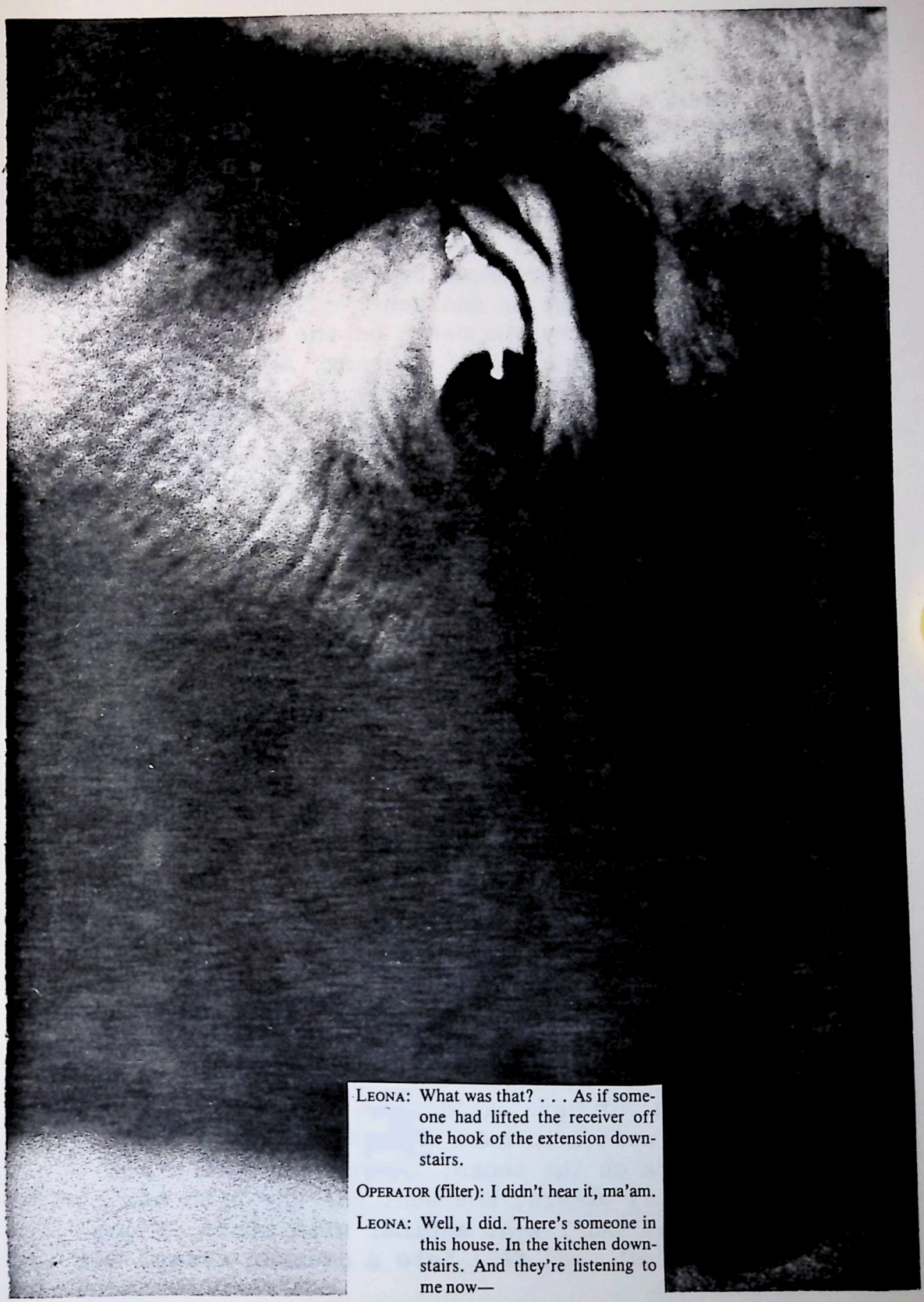
I am depressed. I am crying. Both the emotion and its result disgust me, remind me of self-pity and indulgence. I am utterly selfish. If I direct any actions or thoughts toward others it is only with consideration of what I might gain from them; or what they may think of me as a result. I want to Love but hate myself so much that extending Love toward another seems highly superficial and remote. The best I can do is try and not hate someone as much as I despise myself. I only make love to myself, even though I am married it is only on paper. My compulsion is toward self-immolation. Mental torture is the absolute: Guilt implies Sin-and abuses of the body, the conforming vestibule, can only go so far: it is well known how the body can transform pain into pleasure, and yet the mind can devise structures for Guilt-abuse using the same themes over and over again. So I drink and drink alchohol, run my body down with drugs and lack of sleep. Food is so disgusting; like eating shit in another form. So, we know the body can be trained to accept any form of torture until death, which ceases all pleasure as we know it, but the mind, the Soul, if it endures without body, must continue to drag itself through endless Hells, without rest. Joy is the body, through some outside or inner stimulus, tricking the mind through illusion. Peace can only come through the destruction of the Soul. Lately I have done many horrible things, without regard for myself or the other people involved. There has been no guilt, or only traces of it, which I dismiss casually, feeling a warm peace cover up my heart.


·L'ART·NOUVEAU·
As we follow the killer moving through

Elsie is a pig. I only moved in with her because she has some money and a job. She adores me utterly, loves to take me out and show me off. But most of the time we stay in, drinking and fighting. Boredom makes me battle with her. She is so stupid you can't talk with her; she prattles on and on about the most useless trivialities in her life or the lives of her stupid friends. On top of this she takes speed, white-cross, which makes her blabber endlessly. She hates herself but doesn't know it, so it is easy for me to put her down and keep her there. If I beat her with my hands or with my words, its all the same to her: she sits and cries for hours until I scream at her to stop. I prefer the crying to the blabber, so I constantly confront her with feigned jealousys or anything I can come up with to get her into the Kleenex and off the monologue.

One Sunday afternoon I was watching Wild Kingdom and drinking beer. Elsie was naked lounging next to me on the sofa. She wanted sex but I was having no part in it. A tiger watched a zebra eating grass. She unzipped my fly and pulled my soft cock out. The tiger went for the zebra. She sucked my flacid penis while I drank some beer. I got hard. The tiger killed the zebra. On the upstroke I slammed her hed into the coffe table. She went back down; when she came up again I slammed her head. The tiger ate the zebra. She kept going down and I kept slamming. Blood gushed from the zebra into the tigers mouth. I couldn't -or wouldn't -come. Blood trickled from her ear onto the table, she was semi-conscious. I threw her over over the table, spit on her asshole, and shoved my cock in. She whimpered and saliva and blood mixed on the glass tabletop. I ripped her hole and beat her head rythmically on the glass till it broke. My orgasm came as a Mutual of Omaha ad flashed across the screen. I got up and left the house.

One night Elsie threw a party for me, a surprise party to celebrate my 22nd birthday. She invited her friends and some of mine. Like myself, most of my friends either put up with her idiocy or openly hated her, so they stayed in small groups talking to each other or to me, looking uncomfortably at their watches and toward the door. I got really drunk, took off my clothes and grabbed one of her friends in the kitchen. She was drunk, too, and we made our way through the people talking to the bedroom. We fucked like a couple of horses until the door opened and Elsie looked in. We both said "Hi" to her but she was gone. Soon the party broke up and my best Birthday present left with the rest. Elsie was crying and that suited me fine, of course. Told me how I'd ruined the party. I picked her off the chair by her hair and dragged her into the bedroom. My semen lay in small clots on the bedsheets. I forced her face into it, some of the sticky shit hanging in strings from her black hair. I left her there and went over to a lesbian friend of mine's house, where I attempted to sleep on the couch. In the middle of the night I found myself fucking her little boy's body, licking and sucking till the sun rose. I moved out the next day. That evening Elsie slit her wrists, but didn't die: "It hurt so much I couldn't go on." Then she sought professional help. Told me her analyist wanted to meet the Monster. I didn't comply. Rumors spread. Her new boyfriends tried to kill me, beat me up. I cut one with a knife. Noone bothered me after that. Sometimes she'd call late at night, drunk. I'd hang up in disgust. Now ten years later, she tells the stories, and nobody believes her.



LEONA: What was that? . . . As if someone had lifted the receiver off the hook of the extension downstairs.

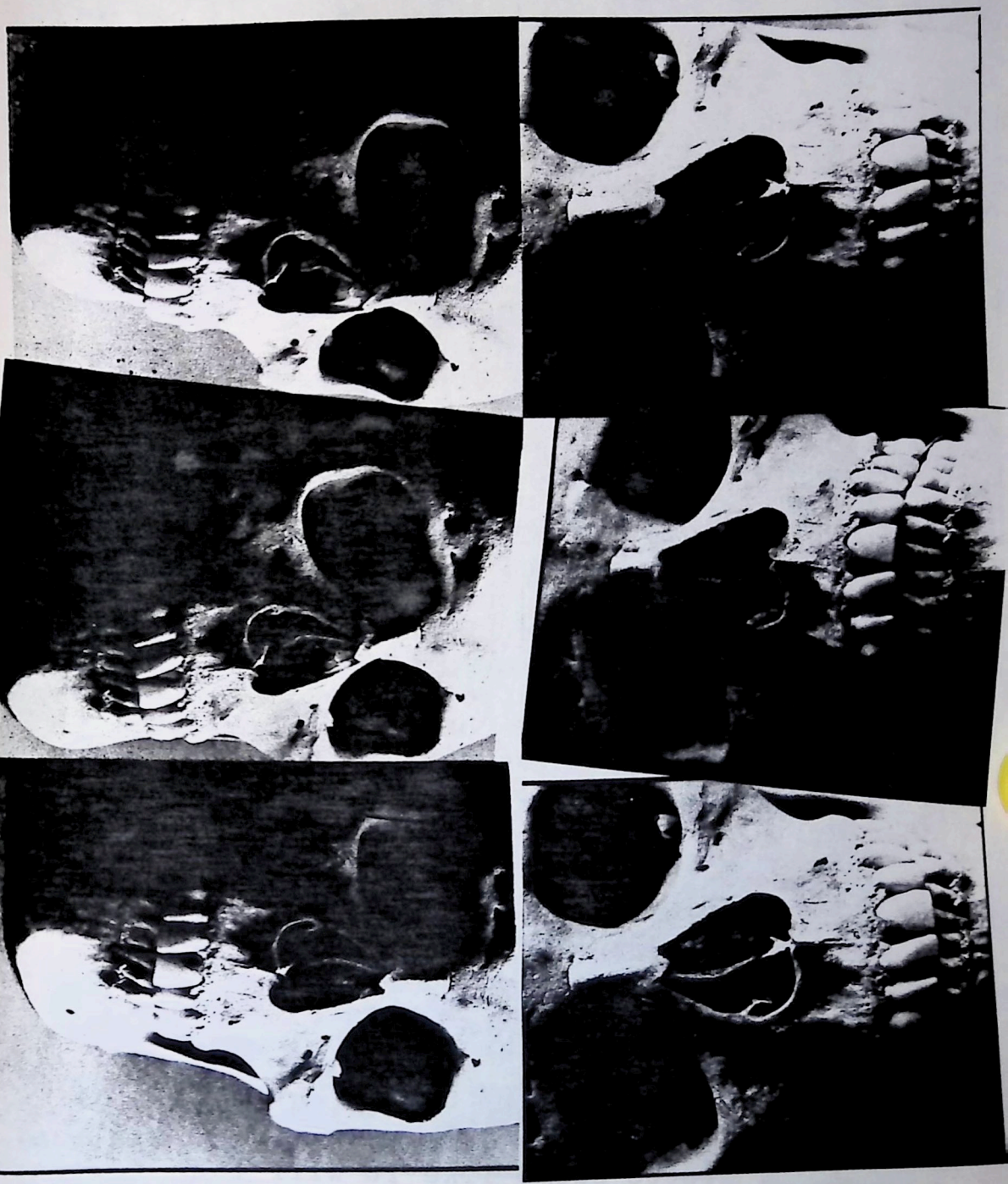
OPERATOR (filter): I didn't hear it, ma'am.

LEONA: Well, I did. There's someone in this house. In the kitchen downstairs. And they're listening to me now—

About a year later, I moved in with Caroline. She was beautiful and smart. When I'd get drunk, she'd beat me up. She was a bit shorter than me but built well-I was pretty skinny and I'd be vulnerable to her frequent attacks. I had to beg her for sex, which she disliked, since she had never experienced orgasm during coitus. Once, she left me and went to Spain, where she fucked boys by the ocean on the sand. Afterwards, she'd cry into Kleenex, which she saved in an alabaster jar and brought home to me. It sits on the mantle in front of me as I write. When she returned, one day in her apartment, determined to make her come, I went down on her for almost an hour. Something kept hitting my tongue, and when she finally did have an orgasm, I rolled off and told her about the obstruction. She went to the bathroom and emereed with a tampon that looked like a sausage in her hand. It had apparently been lodged up her for months. So now, I'd eat her to orgasm and then we'd fuck; finally, she began to come during intercourse. She then fell in love but continued to terrorize me when I got drunk, which was almost every night. The years passed. I turned 25 and had a rush of sudden mortality. I quit drinking and smoking, and took up jogging. She jogged with me at first, but I was much faster and she soon quit in frustration. I began lifting wieghts, too, and became a taut little wiry guy. She began to see other guys, going out to bars while I stayed home. I saw a few other women, too, and this would send her into violent rages. Now, without the booze, I was more than a match for her. We'd both come out bloody, but it seemed to make the sex better. Soon I was back on the booze, though, and one night like many others, she went one way with her friends, and I went another with mine. I got home first, and fell into a drunken sleep. All

at once she attacked me in bed, scratching at my eyes. I got up, naked and wrestled her to the floor. Every time I got her in a position to calm down, holding her, saying something like Okay, okay, I'm going to let go and we'll talk, I'd let go and she'd come at me again. The fighting took us into the kitchen, where she threw me into a wall leaving a large hole in the ancient sheetrock. Then I saw her friend, looking on like she was watching TV. Caroline hit me across the face with a beer bottle. My nose cracked and the blood flew. Leave her alone! Her girlfriend screamed at me. I looked at her holding the pulp of my nose and gurgled She's killing me! Can't you see? Call the police! She ran out into the yard. Caroline came across with the bottle again. I passed out and woke up the next morning naked in the kitchen, my blood a black pool around my head. Another time she chased me down the street with a butcher knife. I ran till my lungs were bursting and stopped in front of a church when it started to rain. The tears ran down my face as the rain came down, and I walked home dodging shadows in the night. She"d shredded the interior of my car, where I'd planned to sleep, and all the windows were broken. I looked up at the house and saw her outline in the window. As it thundered and the rain poured I heard her scream I'll kill you! I knew she was right. I moved out in the morning after she had gone to school. Sometimes in the middle of the night she'd call, and we'd talk like civilized people. After I'd hang up, I'd shiver myself to sleep.

ARTOBJECTS

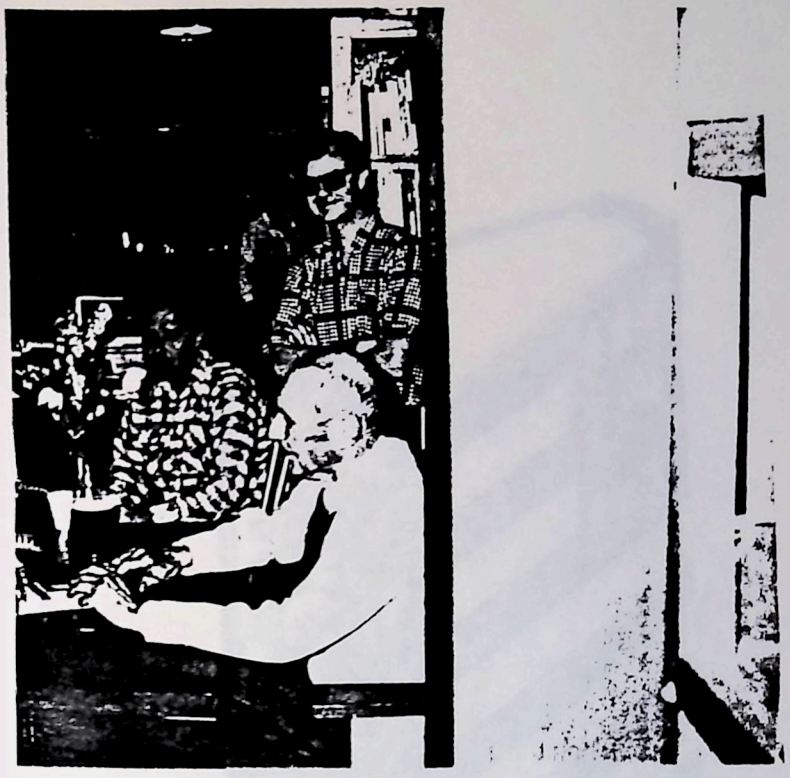


Bill may be done with these disgusting reminiscences now. He's been reliving his past more and more lately. The world of experience exists for the still living; the plethora of memory lives most vividly in the mind of the dying. Like the tree that thinks it is a flower and will be cut down someday for burning and not for beauty, Bill has lived and suffered his life in his mind and ignored his body and now, quite suddenly, both threaten to fail him. He hasn't eaten in almost a week. In the same length of time he has consumed a case of cheap Yugoslavian wine, all the drugs he owned, and innumerable cigarettes. He knew he could do without any of the above except for the cigarettes. He lay in bed between two gray, greasy sheets. His fingers, in a practised, ritualized, automatic gesture tore off the wrinkled tin-foil covered paper top of a seemingly empty pack of Lucky Strikes and found, there in the left corner of the pack, the last cigarette. It had been camouflaged by the white interior of the pack. Normally this type of immaculate deception, this trick of the eye that turns mental despair into a physical miracle would have cheered him, would have transformed the first taste of smoke into honey on his lips. However, the first drag made him cough, double over and gag. He lay back looking at the smoke gather in skeletal forms that hung in the limp, yellow late afternoon light. Once in awhile he'd blow a ghost up toward the cracks in the ceiling. He focuses, dreamily at first, and then more steadily, on the largest crack, gaping down on him amidst a river of fissures that branch out into inlets around the corners of his vision. He feels the heat between his index and middle fingers. This cigarette seems like it will last forever.

Visions of the Afterlife/3

He stares at the Big Daddy crack, which seems to get closer every second and pulls the last drag on the Lucky. He inhales deep and holds it there for a short eternity. The crack advances like a black vertical smile or frown spinning toward him. His eyes dilate. He exhales his smokey soul into the abyss. He dies at precisely five-thirty-one central standard time, within the same hour of his birth thirty-two years, seven months, and seven days ago.

I woke up dead as hell. Got up, walked through the rooms of the house. I have no compulsion to touch anything to reassure myself of my existence. I walk through the front door into white light. No urge for cigarettes or booze. I am travelling at the speed of death. Look! I am making everything new again! People look very good to me. I pass them smiling, wave as they go by. Birds sing into the perfumed air. I copy their songs whistling back to them. The sidewalk is full of cracks bustling with black insect activity. I walk along and the world moves past overloaded with sights and sounds I never noticed before. Blazing white houses with red, green, blue, and gray roofs. Cars accented with sexy silver chrome. Green vegetable life everywhere and the sky a brilliant blue million miles in every direction. I'm suddenly hungry. Ravenous. I cross the street to the grocery store. Go in passing through rows and rows of food. Everything looks good.



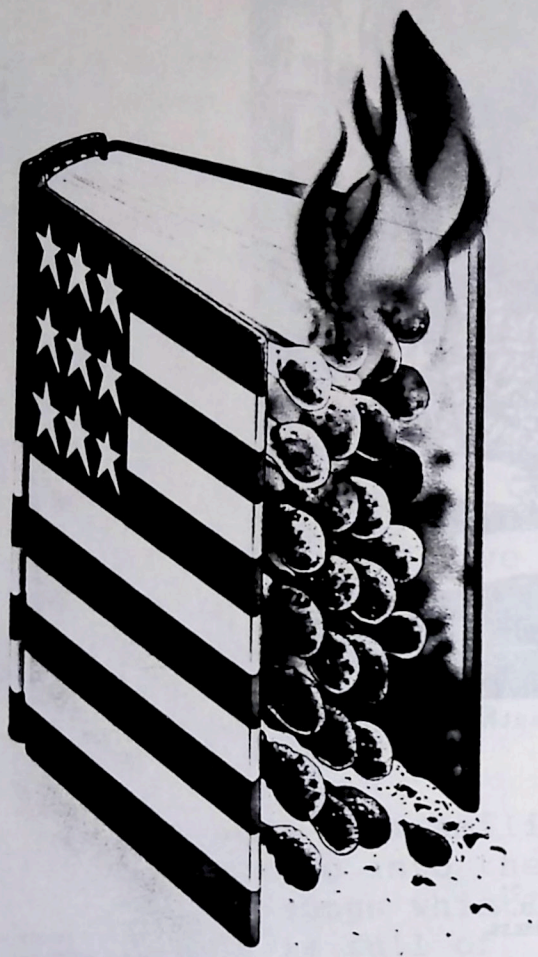
The author (standing) with William Burroughs and another famous author (seated).

Also by John Eberly:

MUMBLES #1, 2, 3, 4, 5*
CARTOON BRUT #1, 2, 3, 4*
BARGAIN BASEMENT MUMBLES
DEAD RINGER
FROM SOUL TO POISON
STEPPING RAZOR
SNAKE PARANOIA IN THE LAND OF OZ*
CANCER IS YOUR FRIEND*
FROM TOKELAND TO TOPEKA*
YOU SMELL LIKE BLOOD*
DEAD SOLDIERS
FIRE AND SMOKE*
LSD*
GARAGE SALE
AMERICAN LEATHER*
CHARLES CHARLES
SHARK BAIT
CULT COMIX #1, 2, 3, 4
THEY WERE IN LOVE*
JUNK and OTHER CULTURE
A JOURNAL IN HELL
KING SEX
THE HOUSE
THE GARDEN
AUTOMATICS

*Collaborations with various other artists. (However, some #'s may indicate John E solo books.)

Work by John Eberly has also appeared in the following magazines: SICK SYSTEM DIGEST, MALICE, WARNING, STARHEAD, MISC!, SCRATCHEZ, THE CLOSEST PENGUINS, FACTSHEET FIVE, INSIDE JOKE, SHATTER SILENCE, CASUAL CASUAL, THE WORKER POET, MY WIFE, MOONSTONE, THE MONTHLY. . .BULLETIN, MEGA-ZINE, GONE!, JERSEY BEAT, INK DISEASE, DADA GUMBO, CITY LIFE, DIDDLEY SQUAT, FANDOM TIMES, SOUND CHOICE, CRAZY MEN DELUXE, MONSTERS AND MUTANTS, NOVUS, NATIONAL LAMPOON, HERE WE GO, XEX MAIL ART, WICHITA EAGLE BEACON, ALLPHABET FUNNIES, TUBER'S VOICE, LIES WE TELL, EXQUISITE CORPSE, BEATLESS NEWS, KICKS, BROUHAHA, THRESHOLD OF REALITY, WHOLE EARTH CATALOG, SNARF COMIX #10, BAD NEWZ, SELECTED OOZE, VOODOO SOUP, FULL MOON, TUYAU Nº 109, SO BE IT, and many others he can't remember. . .



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